

What Happens in the Field

by Trinial

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Summary: Horrible title, yes. What do Marines do when there are no Spartans around to save them? One fire team's brief encounter.

Rating is for violent content and complex ideas.

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Author's Note: This work is intended as a vignette. There have been many fanfics about Halo that focus on children and/or civilians, and I feel that the Marines are not viewed as being what they are. Marines in combat are typically eighteen and nineteen year old teenagers who have just left home. They are nervous and afraid, even if they do not show it. They are trained to be professional- not to think about what they are doing placing their lives on the line, but to think about getting the job done, no matter the cost. While they go out and do the fighting and the dying, the people they graduated from high school with are just getting into college, partying, and thinking about getting married. They never have to think about a will, or what will their mother think if she gets that letter. The one that says "We regret to inform youâ€¦". If you choose to read this, keep this in mind. Now, enough of my ranting. Enjoy!_

Private Lee Conners moved down the south side of the street, keeping

his focus on the rear of the formation. At the moment, he didn't know or care about where they were going. All that mattered to Connors was that nothing tried to sneak up behind them. He kept looking in the windows and on the rooftops of the bombed-out buildings, checking out the alleyways that they had just crossed. He tried at the same time to ignore not only the weight of the machine gunner's extra ammunition, but also the blood on the streets.

It was weird what a difference it made to be here, instead of watching it unfold on the news at home. There, he could look at as many Covenant bodies as he wanted, without ever having to see anything too grisly. It was easy to imagine that humans were winning the war, with all the Grunt bodies piled up in the hundreds. Then, however, two or three days later he would always hear about that particular planet getting glassed, and any ideas of a turning point in the war would be dashed. Plus, the media never showed all the civilian casualties. There were only numbers there, never bodies. The media never showed whole families charred to a crisp by close-range plasma fire as they huddled together in a bunker; or the remains of humans torn apart by the ravenous, victorious Grunts and Jackals. Everything was always happy and looking good until the planet was glassed and the remaining billions of lives were snuffed out. The media couldn't hide that, and the government didn't want them to. It was what had kept us from losing the war this long.

The draft had never had to be reinstated. People were joining left and right, and they just kept coming. There were stories of times when people would object to killing because they didn't want to kill people. The Covenant, however, weren't people. Connors had not met one human yet that didn't think he or she couldn't take a Covenant life. They were alien, but what's more, they were genocidal aliens. Obsessed with killing and eradicating all human life. That was why no one had any problems with a war.

Still, they were incredibly advanced. Their technology was so far beyond anything that we had. The old stories also told of a time when people would join the Navy if they didn't want to die. Now, joining the Navy was a sure sign of seeing action, and, more often than not, death. The Marines, however, had kept our cultic initiation rights—our rights of passage. Not just anybody could be a Marine. Join the Army, defend the Earth against all attackers, for sooner or later, they will find us. Until then, the Marines would fight on land, sea, air and space for freedom, survival, and existence. Be hardcore, be motivated, and never, ever stop attacking!

At least that's what the recruiting posters said. So Connors joined the Corps. He stepped up, took the challenge, and, after six weeks of misery in San Diego, he became one of the Few. Then he went to the infantry. The hardest of the hardcore. Ever since he saw the Marines fighting Covenant in the broadcasts, he knew that he had to be among them. They had no fear. They took horrifying losses, and kept coming back for more. The sergeants seemed invincible, and the officers were wise. Not to mention the teamwork and the brotherhood. High school football had never been like this.

It was also amazing what his mind was capable of now. He could think and reminisce on all these things, and continue paying attention to everything around him. He kept an eye behind them, and every three steps he made sure that Lance Corporal Hall, the fire team leader, didn't have any new orders. Connors didn't understand what was going

on, at least not completely. There was nothing around here. This planet, Proxima III, had been in contention for two weeks. The bigwigs seemed to be certain that the Covenant were looking for something, but they wouldn't, or couldn't, say what. There was always fighting in this city, in fact Conners could hear the staccato of Marine small arms fire, and the higher pitched whine of Covenant plasma weapons from here, mixed in with the explosions of tanks and artillery. Yet all was quiet in this sector. There was red, purple, and florescent blue blood covering the walls all around, as well as bodies and pieces of bodies everywhere. In fact he nearly tripped over a severed Grunt arm.

Just as he did so, he saw something. He held up his fist in the "freeze" signal, and held it for a four count, just as he had been trained. Then he slowly moved his hand back to the hand guard of his battle rifle, and scanned the area. He knew that the rest of the fire team had stopped, and that he didn't need to worry about them not watching his back. They provided a full 360-degree security area, each Marine watching his own sector of fire. This in mind, Conners kept an eye on the street, every sense fully attuned, watchful for the slightest movement. His eyes scanned at street level, where he had seen the first disturbance. His eyes scanned right over the top of his weapon's muzzle, making sure he was always ready to fire.

Then he saw it again! The unmistakable glint of sunlight on moving armor. Then the first round came before he could give the alarm. A Grunt's head and arm appeared on the right side of the alley they had just passed, and a bright green light came screaming towards Conners. It was poorly aimed, and splashed on the wall to his right, showering him with superheated wall fragments. It burned, and the blast had made an eerie high pitched sound as it went by, but Conners' training had already taken over his actions.

"Contact rear!" he shouted.

Immediately the report of an MA5b sounded close by, and Conners himself fired two bursts at the Grunt. The Grunt got away, but then four more jumped out of both sides of the alley. The MA5b had taken on a roll as the fire team's automatic weapon. It was simple, light, and capable of putting far more rounds down range than a BR-55. Being an assault rifle, it didn't quite have the punch of the BR-55, but it made up for it in sheer numbers, not to mention its superior ability to provide suppressive fire while the rest of the fire team found cover.

Conners took down two grunts with his next two bursts, but six more replaced them. PFC Burt, the automatic machine gunner, was incredibly accurate with the MA5b, but it didn't seem to matter. As soon as those grunts were dropped, a phalanx of jackals wheeled out of an alleyway further down the street and started marching towards the Marines' position. Behind the jackals, Conners could see more grunts, as well as on of the things every Marine feared facing with just a fire team- an Elite.

"Lance Corporal, we got big trouble!" Conners shouted.

The enemy was still outside grenade range, and Connors didn't know what else to do. The elite started firing from way out there, and one round came entirely too close. They were still almost six hundred

meters away, and that elite's aim would just be getting better. The Marines took cover behind a few piles of rubble, making sure there was at least twenty meters separating them from the closest Marine. Those plasma grenades were nasty things, and no one wanted to get hit with one; even fewer wanted to get hit with one, and cause another Marine's death because he was too close.

Lance Corporal Hall shouted, "Burt, can you hit that elite?"

"No, Lance Corporal" Burt replied. "He's still too far."

Maybe so, Conners thought, _but he is head and shoulders above those jackals. That's why he can fire at this range. I wonderâ€|_

Conners took careful aim; utilizing the training he had received in boot camp. _Breathe, relax, aim, stop, squeezeâ€|_ Three rounds left his barrel, and all three hit the elite in the head. Its shields flared, and it immediately dropped behind the safety of the jackals' more durable hand held shields. _Well, that should keep him down for a while, _ Conners thought.

"Contact front!" shouted Private Albert Jones, the team's rifleman and scout.

Conners chanced a glance in that direction, and saw a whole pack of grunts, all crowding around _another_ elite. He turned back to his area of fire. He guessed the jackals to be at around four hundred and fifty meters away now. That was close enough. He started to fire, aiming for the firing niches built into the jackals' shields. Burt had the same idea, and opened fire on the same group, hoping to overload one of them enough to make it collapse. He wouldn't be able to do it on his own, so Conners shifted his aim at the same jackal.

Burt had to change clips once, and Conners twice, but the shield finally collapsed and the jackal went down. The Covenant was well trained, however. The elite immediately stepped into the gap and primed a plasma grenade. It chucked the round explosive better, further and faster than any major league baseball player. It covered the remaining three hundred and fifty meters in less than a second, landing right on the other side of the rubble pile from Conners.

"Grenade!" Conners shouted as he ducked as far behind the pile as possible.

There was a deafening explosion, and the heat in the air skyrocketed. It was hard to breathe, and Connors' ears were ringing, he tried to look back at the Covenant and resume firing, but the heat was too much. The area on the other side of the rubble pile had turned into a hellish wasteland of fire, glass, and heat. It was dissipating quickly, but every half-second was an eternity too long.

Conners looked around. He still couldn't hear anything but this horrible ringing, and the only thing he could smell was something that he couldn't identify, but it was hot. His entire world was reduced to sight. So he looked. Lance Corporal Hall was talking on his radio, presumably calling for reinforcements. Jones was fighting valiantly against the oncoming sea of grunts at the team's front.

Burt was laying down as many rounds as he could, holding off the Covenant to the rear until Connors could rejoin him. Burt would probably need more ammo soon.

"Here!" Connors shouted as he threw the extra ammo bag to Burt. Then he got back into the fight. The covenant was within two hundred and fifty meters now. The jackals' formation had fractured slightly, allowing the grunts to open fire. The elite's blue armor was now well noticeable, and it was starting to fire in earnest. Worse than anything, it was accurate.

The elite fired off a burst, and Burt screamed. Connors looked over and saw the Marine lying on the ground, writhing in agony. At least he was still alive. He might be in serious condition, though. Connors primed his own grenade, waited for fire to somewhat shift away from him, then he prepared to throw.

"Frag out!" he shouted as he let the explosive fly. He waited till he heard the explosion, dull sounding past the ringing still in his ears, and sprinted over to Burt's position. The Marine was in a bad way. The heat cauterized the wounds, but it had done a fair amount of damage. From what Connors could tell, the ablative chest plate had stopped the plasma from hitting Burt's lungs, but the second round had hit the abdominal area, and had gotten through. Connors couldn't say for sure what had been hit, but he would survive for at least a few minutes.

Connors got up and started firing again. He hit the elite as much as he could, but the blasted thing kept getting behind the jackals whenever its shields went down. So he killed grunts while the elite was hidden. The enemy was within one hundred meters now, and Connors was getting scared. This was one sided. They didn't have enough ammo left to take down all these things, and now they had a casualty to protect.

Hall shouted, "Grenade!" and Connors fell on top of Burt, protecting the wounded man as much as he could. There was another deafening explosion that sounded as if the entire world was falling apart. When he looked up, Jones was lying nearby. Both of the man's legs were gone below the knee, and his left arm was completely burned away. Connors couldn't tell if he was alive or dead. Hall was still fighting nearby, but there was no hope now. Connors got up, and almost tried to fire, when he noticed that the barrel had been caught in the blast. It was little more than slag now. So he picked up Burt's assault rifle and started laying down as much fire as he could. He fired a burst in one direction, and then in another, trying to keep both fronts at bay. They were within fifty meters now, and Connors could only hope that Hall had gotten through to nearby forces. If nothing else, the other Marines would know what was going on.

There was an explosion, and the world turned upside down for what seemed like a full three seconds. Then he landed on his back and the wind rushed from his lungs. He tried to inhale, but it was so hard to breathe. The heat was intense, and he could feel his skin burn, and it felt like he had been in the middle of that explosion. Even his lungs felt like they had blisters in them. He looked up. There was an elite standing over him. Eight feet of solid muscle, and every fiber of that thing's existence screamed for human blood. It looked down at Connors, the light glinting off of its helmet. It clicked its

mandibles in delight as it pointed the plasma rifle at his head. If it were not for the ringing in his ears, he would have heard the grunts cheering in the background.

Then the elite's chest exploded in a shower of purple blood, its shields flaring and doing nothing to stop the large caliber rounds. There was more noise, and finally Conners lost consciousness.

Private Lee Conners woke up to the smell of antiseptics. He was in a cool, clean bed in what looked to be a shipboard infirmary. He took a moment to do a check of himself, only to find that most of his body was covered in gauze bandages. Sitting next to his bed was Lance Corporal Hall.

"Hey, Conners. How ya doin'?" Hall asked when he noticed that his teammate was awake. Conners took a moment to consider the question.

"I feel like I had a dropship land on me." he grunted. "What happened out there?" Hall chuckled.

He said, "Well, a grenade went off a little too close to you. I thought you were a goner for sure. Then we were overrun. Two jackals grabbed me, and that elite was planning on killing you first, and then making a show of offing me. Before he could, however, a dropship showed up and mowed him down, along with the other elite and several grunts. The rest of them freaked and took off. Second squad hunted them down and finished our patrol for us. Theirs was quiet."

"Jones and Burt?" Conners asked.

Hall sobered. "They didn't make it. Jones died from the shock of his wounds, and Burt was taken out with the same blast that almost got you." He looked at his watch, then said, "Get some rest. I've got to go send in for replacements, and then report to Corporal Locklear."

"Roger that, Lance Corporal." Conners said. Hall got up and walked off, and Conners went back to sleep.

End
file.